

Good Friday 2022

The cross is the most dramatic event in world history. I say that without hesitation. It has been called the hinge of history. The cosmic battle over the souls of mankind had reached the final battle. You might think that Armageddon is the final battle, or the battle at the end of the millennium would be, but those battles are just the mopping up exercise of what was determined by the cross. This greatest of all battles began shortly after the creation of mankind in the Garden of Eden. And yes, it is a real story, an historical story, one that Jesus declared to be true by quoting a portion of it. Even modern science has proven the human genome came from one woman they refer to as Eve.

There had to be freedom for mankind to choose or love would be coerced, and so our Creator allowed Lucifer to rebel and give man an alternative to goodness, light, and love. He tempted Eve to rebel against God who had given Adam and her all they could ever need. It is the same temptation he uses to lure people today. "You shall be as gods. Don't trust what God said, He just wants you to keep from enjoying life to the full." Eve chose and Adam followed. The wonderful fellowship they had with God was broken. They changed, but God didn't. He was still as loving and gracious as He has ever been. That is why despite their rebellion, He gave them a promise and a covering.

The promise was that the day would come when a male descendant of Eve would crush the authority/head of the one who deceived them. It was the very first indication of this great plan of God. Then God did another gracious and merciful thing. He clothed them with animal skins. It was another prophecy in dramatic form. Something innocent had to die to cover their sinfulness. That is what animal sacrifice would picture for the millennia that followed, until the Lamb of God would come, the promised descendant of Eve, who would restore us to fellowship with God by giving *His* life as payment for *our* rebellion.

Those of you who have been with us on Wednesday nights have seen the ups and downs of human history. There were more downs than ups because we are so susceptible to the lies of the enemy of our souls. That is because we inherited Adam's fallen nature. But every time - God would raise up someone to turn people back to Himself until the Promised One came.

The prophets over the centuries gave us the details of how God would prevail in this great battle. The One to come would be born of virgin from the line of King David in the town of Bethlehem. He would be God with us. He would heal the sick and cause the blind to see and the lame to walk. He would reach out to the Gentiles and teach around the northern shores of Galilee, a light in the darkness of the world. He would be rejected by His own people, beaten, and die by crucifixion among criminals. He would be buried in a rich man's tomb. But He would rise from death and reign forever, removing our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. All of that was predicted hundreds of years before He fulfilled it.

When Jesus was born just as predicted, there was a great expectation in the world of a coming king. The Jews thought He would throw off the Roman oppression and be a great military general, but Jesus came to win a much greater battle. He came to restore our fellowship with God. How could a carpenter from a tiny town in northern Israel do that? Though it was clearly predicted, no one really saw it coming except a prophet in the temple. When Jesus was brought to be dedicated, he told Mary of not only Jesus great future but that a sword would pierce her heart.

The battle would be clear from the time He was born. When the ruler of the region found out from the wisemen that the king was born, he sent his soldiers to kill all the babies

in Bethlehem. But God is always one step ahead of the enemy, for He is all-knowing. He sent the family into Egypt to escape the threat.

After that ruler died, the family returned to the little town of Nazareth where Jesus grew up in relative obscurity. As soon as He began His ministry, Lucifer confronted Him at the end of a forty day fast. He challenged what Jesus had heard from God by asking if He really was the Son of God, and if He was then do this or that. Jesus deflected the temptations with Scripture, showing us how to resist temptations.

As Jesus continued to minister for three years, the attacks would come from the religious world, just as they do today. The religious scholars and leaders were always challenging Him. They accused Him of operating by the power of Lucifer. They harassed Him throughout those three years, but Jesus kept addressing their hearts and defeating their attacks. But when Jesus raised Lazarus from death, they knew that **if** they did not stop Him they would lose their power and positions. They plotted how they might have Him put to death.

Think of how insane that is. Their every argument was countered by His wisdom. They saw Him do the impossible, casting out demons, healing paralytics, deformities, and all manner of illness. Men who hadn't walked in years were on their feet and jumping for joy. A man born blind saw everything clearly and understood what he was seeing. Even the dead were raised to life. It seems to me they ignored the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah because they didn't want to believe it. They knew if He was honored it would be their demise. So they went against all reason and decided to kill Him. Little did they know that they were carrying out God's plan.

And how could they have known. Sure, it was in the prophecies, but no one thought God would come into this world as a man to die for our sins. It was too gracious, too loving, too merciful to imagine. That is because we look around and don't see anyone who comes close to that kind of person, but Jesus isn't a sinful person. He was conceived without a sin nature like the rest of us. Even if they accepted that, it is still too great a love to fathom.

On the third Passover of His ministry, He was headed toward Jerusalem for the last time. He knew His time had come for Him to receive the wrath of God upon our sins. The justice we deserve was going to fall on Him, and He alone could do it. He had the last Passover meal with His disciples and taught them such powerful lessons that they fill almost half of the Gospels. He taught in the temple. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane under such stress that drops of blood came from the pours on His head. He knew that was His last night of freedom, so He prayed until His arrest. Judas had betrayed Him. The soldiers came to arrest Him. He submitted Himself to them. He was taken to Annas compound for the first interrogation. A soldier struck His face for His honest answer. Jesus calmly asked him why he had hit him for an honest answer. Annas saw he couldn't get any information from Him so he had him lowered into a cistern for the night. At the crack of dawn, another trial began, this time by Annas son-in-law, the current high priest, Caiaphas. Caiaphas tried false witnesses, but they could not agree. So he demanded Jesus tell the truth, "Are you the Son of God?" Jesus answered in the affirmative and referred to a prophecy of Daniel that ends with all the world worshiping Him. Caiaphas was enraged and tore his robe.

Then they took Jesus to the political leaders Pilate and Herod, a son of the man who tried to have Jesus killed as a baby. Herod just wanted to see a miracle. Pilate had Jesus whipped half to death. Pilates wife was warned in a dream not to convict Jesus, but Pilate was caught by the circumstances. His sponsor in Rome had been executed for treason. If these Jewish leaders told the emperor that Pilate would not execute a man who declared himself king, Pilate would certainly be exiled. So Pilate gave in and ordered the crucifixion.

It was one of the most horrible ways to die that was ever invented. It was meant to keep a person in the worst possible agony for days. Jesus was probably already in shock from the flogging and had lost a lot of blood. As He carried the cross to the place of crucifixion he collapsed. A random person was pulled from the crowd to help Him get the crossbeam up the hill. There they drove the spikes in His wrists and feet. There hanging in ignominy between two thieves His life ebbed away. But even in His agony He forgave those who crucified Him. He received one of the thief's confession and promised him they would be in Paradise that day. He took care of His mother's future. And then as He fought the pain of crushing nerves in his hands and feet and torn back, darkness came over the land. Your sins and mine were laid on Him. The wrath of God for those sins descended on Him.

People ask, "Who would do that to their own Son?" They can't imagine doing something like that. What kind of God is this? The Father and the Son agreed to do this out of love for us, knowing there was no other way for justice to be served. I think there was no other way for us to see how greatly we are loved and how great God's grace is.

As the light returned, Jesus put His spirit into His Father's hands and declared, "It is finished." The reason He came was to win the victory. The battle for the souls of men and women was won for all who will receive what He did for us. I think Satan thought he had won until Jesus uttered that final declaration. He must have thought, "What does that mean. "Noooooo!" I won! He is dead. The souls of mankind are mine now! But that phrase "It is finished" also means "paid in full." I can imagine Satan screaming in defeat when he realized what just happened. He had done what he hoped to do, torture and kill God in the flesh, but God declared the victory. He must have suddenly realized his fate was sealed. It would be three days before Satan realize how completely he had lost, and fifty more until he could see God's future plan, God's Holy Spirit in millions of sanctified believers!

The disciples also had thought all was lost. That final word from Jesus must have gone over and over in their minds while they hid from the authorities. A couple of sleepless nights lay ahead. It was Friday, but Sunday was coming.

Will you let that word stir in your heart from now till Sunday morning? It is finished! The war is over. Paid in full! We need to realize what that means to us. There are still skirmishes, but the war is over. Jesus is the victory for everyone who will receive Him. He price He paid in our place, eternal forgiveness is ours in Him.

Communion

Psalm 89:22-29 (ESV)

²² The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him. ²³ I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. ²⁴ My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted. ²⁵ I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. ²⁶ He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'

²⁷ And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. ²⁸ My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. ²⁹ I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.